

DIALOG REPORT #10

BIOREGIONAL ASSESSMENT

DIALOG HELD MAY 30, 2013

LIONS GATE HOTEL, NEAR SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA, AND INYO NATIONAL FOREST, BISHOP, CALIFORNIA

OVERVIEW

On May 30, 2013, the Forest Service held its tenth Sierra Cascades Dialog on the *Bioregional Assessment Draft Report*. As the Pacific Southwest Region of the Forest Service (Region 5) moves forward with Forest Plan revision, the bioregional assessment is an important step in the planning process. The assessment synthesizes existing information related to social, economic, and ecological conditions and trends providing a foundation for forest plans. In addition, each “early adopter” forest will conduct a forest-level assessment; the Inyo, Sequoia, and Sierra are the first National Forests in the region (known as early adopters) to move forward with forest planning. Region 5, in conversation with stakeholders at the Dialog and elsewhere, determined that conducting the bioregional assessment would be valuable to support the overall Forest

DIALOG PURPOSE: UNDERSTAND AND
PROVIDE FEEDBACK ON THE DRAFT
BIOREGIONAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

Plan revision process. This Dialog concentrated on the draft assessment report released for review in late May for Dialog participants and the public to review. Participants provided input on the major themes of the report: water quality and quantity,

fire resilience, ecological integrity, sustainable recreation, and community resilience. Region 5 Social Scientist Debra Whitall provided an overview presentation of the forest planning process.

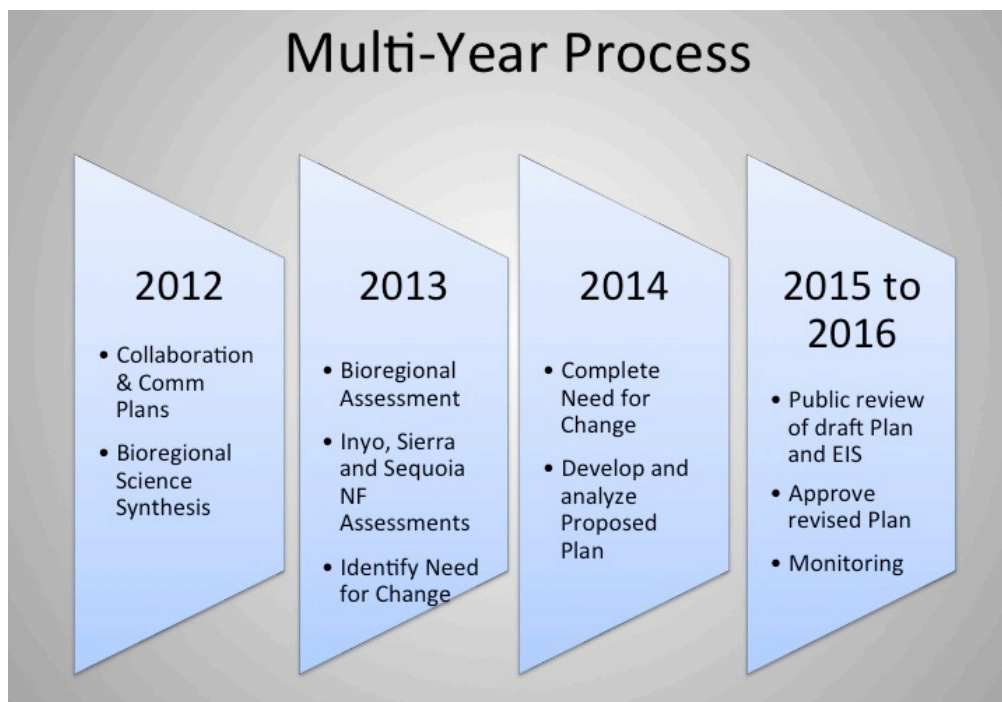
Approximately 110 stakeholders in Sacramento and 10 stakeholders in Bishop, California, participated in the daylong Dialog. Participants included Forest Service staff and stakeholders representative of diverse interest groups, including conservation/environmental, fire safe councils, contractors, county governments, forest products industry, land managers, local elected officials, private landowners, recreation, rural communities, scientists, state government, and water agencies. Tribal members and youth were missing from the audience.

The intent of the Dialog is for stakeholders to engage in conversation on land management issues of regional importance for the Sierra Nevada and the Cascades. The goal of the Dialog is to create shared understanding among participants with diverse opinions. Dialog outcomes inform future Forest Service management strategies. The first Dialog helped the Region to refine the Leadership Intent for Ecological Restoration.

The second Dialog on *Values, Attitudes and Beliefs* has informed the Region's biological assessment for forest planning and led to the science synthesis. The third Dialog on *Improving Rural Economies* built on work underway in partnership with County elected officials, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, the Biodiversity Council, and other initiatives around the state. The fourth Dialog on *Science Synthesis* identified questions that stakeholders would like the science synthesis to answer. The fifth Dialog vetted a Collaborative Model for each early adopter forest to use during Forest Plan revision. The current Collaborative Guide includes Dialog participants' suggestions, and the Forests and Region 5 have developed Collaboration & Communication Plans, recommended in the guide, with stakeholders. The sixth Dialog on *Adaptive Management in Forest Planning* increased understanding about planning as a cyclical process. The seventh Dialog on *Recreation: Social and Economic Benefits* will inform future planning by deepening understanding about demographic trends and the implications for Forests. The eighth Dialog on the *Science Synthesis* increased understanding about the Science Synthesis report, including how scientists addressed questions identified through Dialog. The ninth Dialog focused on conditions and trends for the bioregional assessment, contributing to the development of the report that was the focus of this Dialog.

BIOREGIONAL ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

Dr. Debra Whittall, Region 5 Social Scientist, provided an overview of Forest Plan revision under the 2012 Planning Rule. Deb explained that the planning process is continuously moving through three phases: assessment, plan revision, and monitoring. She outlined the steps involved in the multi-year process.



Each early adopter forest and the regional office have developed collaboration & communication plans with stakeholder input. The Pacific Southwest Research Station also completed the Science Synthesis. This year, each forest is performing an assessment to lay the informational foundation for plans. In 2014, the forests identify the need for change based on conditions and trends identified in the assessment and develop the proposed plan. In 2015-2016, the public will review the draft plan and environmental impact statement. The deciding official (Forest Supervisor) will approve the forest plan and begin the monitoring program.

WHAT IS A FOREST PLAN

The federal government requires all national forests/grasslands to have a forest plan. The intent of a forest plan is to provide broad integrated management direction for the national forest – much like a strategic plan. Plans are programmatic in nature, do not make site-specific decisions, and have a 10-15 year life span. All the activities on the forests, restoration or commercial activity or recreation, must comply with the forest plan.

Plans have several components: desired conditions, objectives, suitability of uses, standards, and guidelines. Plans also identify management areas, specific places of importance, recommended areas (such as Wild & Scenic Rivers), priority watersheds, and monitoring plans.

*THE **2012 PLANNING RULE** DIRECTS THAT FOREST PLANS PROVIDE FOR SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY WITHIN FOREST SERVICE AUTHORITY AND CONSISTENT WITH THE INHERENT CAPABILITY OF THE PLAN AREA.*

***SUSTAINABILITY** IS THE CAPABILITY TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE PRESENT GENERATION WITHOUT COMPROMISING THE ABILITY OF FUTURE GENERATIONS TO MEET THEIR NEEDS.*

ASSESSMENT PURPOSE

An assessment is a report that synthesizes existing information related to social, economic, and ecological conditions and trends. The intent is to gather information and data that are readily available, identifying gaps in information and knowledge. Assessments will occur at the forest level and at the bioregional level. An assessment is meant to establish the context of current conditions and anticipated future conditions. Assessments provide the necessary information to evaluate and determine needed changes in existing forest plans. Assessments cover up to fifteen different topic areas. While the 2012 Planning Rule requires forest-level assessment, it does not require the Bio-Regional Assessment. Based on stakeholder input, the Region decided to complete the Bio-Regional Assessment at this large scale to help guide forest plan revisions and help identify overarching themes.

LIVING ASSESSMENT

Each topic paper is shared on the Living Assessment—a Wiki that allows everyone to contribute scientific information following protocols and monitored for appropriateness.

The Living Assessment focuses on peer-reviewed and other relevant information, scientific understanding, and monitoring results. The Wiki will continue throughout the course of time. At certain points in time, the regional planning team will gather information from the Wiki to prepare written reports. For example, the BioRegional Assessment Report is based on information pulled from the Wiki in April 2013. After April, the Wiki will continue on, bringing together additional scientific information. This information could be used later in time during the plan revision phase.

<http://livingassessment.wikispaces.com/>

BIO-REGIONAL ASSESSMENT

The Regional Planning Team identified five central themes for the Bio-Regional Assessment Report: water quality and quantity, fire resilience, ecological integrity, sustainable recreation, and community resilience. The Team asked the following questions to identify the themes:

- Is it related to and appropriately addressed at the bio regional scale?
- Are stakeholders concerned about it?
- Is sustainability in question?
- Does it have linkages woven through the 15 topic papers?
- Is it something that forest plans influence?
- Is it relative to the Leadership Intent for Ecological Restoration and the Planning Rule?

Therefore, overarching themes in the Bio-Regional Assessment are consistent with the Leadership Intent for Ecological Restoration; consistent among the 15 topic papers; and focus on sustainability and integration of social, economic, and ecological integrity per the 2012 Planning Rule. The Bio-Regional Assessment provides a backdrop for the early adopter forests on management themes that cross boundaries and will allow those forests to integrate this overarching story as they develop the individual forest assessments.

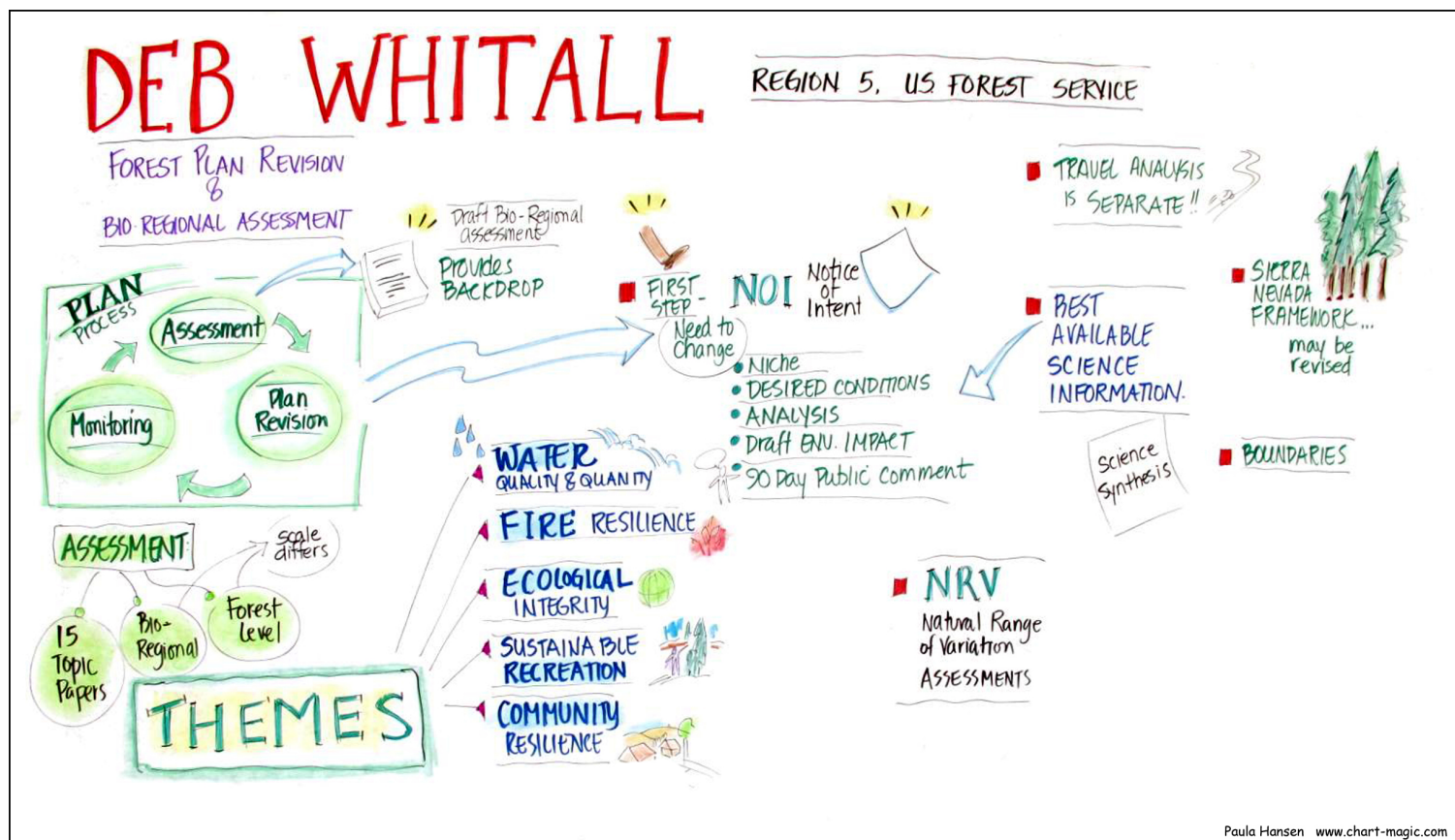
BEST AVAILABLE SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION

The 2012 Planning Rule requires the use of the best available scientific information to develop forest-planning documents. Scientific information in the planning process comes from a variety of sources with differing degrees of scientific certainty and can include peer-reviewed scientific literature, government reports, professional associations and interest groups, and the public. To support the scientific basis of the Bio-Regional Assessment, the Region sponsored a Science Synthesis, in which scientists from the Pacific Southwest Research Station of the Forest Service researched and wrote using peer-reviewed scientific information. The Science Synthesis integrates scientific information across disciplines to inform managers and stakeholders. The Research Station expects to release the final version in August 2013. The Science Synthesis will be used during the NEPA process of forest plan revision. An addendum to the Science Synthesis is underway for the Great Basin and High Desert.

The Pacific Southwest Region Ecology Unit developed Natural Range of Variation assessments for 11 terrestrial ecosystems, using historical information primarily from the pre-Euro-American period and from contemporary reference ecosystems. Natural Range of Variation assessments provide baseline information on ecosystem conditions (composition, structure, and function) that can be compared to current conditions to develop an idea of trend over time. These trend assessments form the basis for the assessment of ecological integrity.

TRAVEL ANALYSIS PROCESS

The travel management rule and Planning Rule are separate and independent. Completing Travel Management, Subpart A, is not required for a Forest Plan Revision. The travel analysis process can provide useful information to the plan revision process including up-to-date road information and increased understanding of road-related issues. Depending on the issues driving a “need to change” the existing forest plan, the responsible official/forest supervisor’s decision could influence future project-level decisions concerning motorized use. In other words, a forest plan revision will not make site-specific decisions on motorized use, but could influence future project-level decisions concerning motorized use based on the forest plan’s five components (desired conditions, objectives, suitability of uses, standards, and guidelines).



QUESTIONS FOR DEBRA WHITALL

After listening to the presentation, Bishop participants asked questions of Dr. Whittall while Sacramento participants talked together. Then Sacramento participants asked questions with Dr. Whittall's clarifications provided here.

The Bio-Regional Assessment report is a snapshot in time of the Living Assessment. The Living Assessment continues to be open and updated continually. Each Forest will also do an assessment. The Living Assessment snapshot informed the authors on the content of the Bio-Regional Assessment. The Living Assessment is open to all people and is the place to gather scientific information. People can post opinions and ideas on *Our Forest Place*. To participate in either the scientific or opinion forum requires creating an account on the web site.

The Forest Service staff review the Wiki and 15 chapters and used this information to write the bio-regional assessment. Staff will continue to monitor the Wiki, posting and reviewing new information.

The Inyo National Forest is working with the Pacific Southwest Research Station to create a scientific synthesis for the Eastern Slope of the Sierra Nevada. The Inyo National Forest will announce the schedule.

Participants and the public can provide input on the Bio-Regional Assessment through the Wiki, email, or CrowdBrite before June 15.

The Forest Service has tried to integrate the triple-bottom line (Social, Economic, and Ecological) across all 15 themes in the report.

Participants suggested that competing priorities need to be better defined.

The scope of the Bio-Regional Assessment is statewide. If a national forest in the Sierra Cascades bioregion touched a boundary of a county, the Forest Service included social-economic data for that county.

One participant commented about the challenge of maintaining roads. The person suggested that timber harvest used to be used for road maintenance.

One participant expressed concern about the definition of an Off-Highway Vehicle visitor. Is a hunter, rock hound, or others who use dirt roads included in the definition?

Someone suggested that hunting and OHV as recreation is missing from the report.

Participant recommends that elevating the importance of fire resilience and the threat of catastrophic fire as paramount. Participant would like to highlight the ecological value of fire and impact on particular species.

Participant talked about the effect of methodology in the collection of data. Participant suggested the benefit of gathering information in a high-tech manner.

The Forest Service values the regional approach and received feedback in support of the regional approach from others through the Dialog. Each Forest will do an individual-level assessment. Forest Plans are not meant to manage site-specific issues. The Bio-Regional Assessment will address issues and systems that cut across forest boundaries and must be considered at a larger scale.

INSIGHTS AND FEEDBACK ON THE BIO-REGIONAL ASSESSMENT

At this Dialog, participants broke into small groups, organized by theme, to provide feedback on the Bio-Regional Assessment. Each group's facilitator recorded input on CrowdBrite – an electronic bulletin board that allowed like-ideas to be grouped together, and participants were able to add in feedback on the electronic format for two weeks following the event. The following represents a snap shot of the many comments received on CrowdBrite. Participants commented on:

- What works?
- What would participants strengthen?
- What's missing?
- Other Comments

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Need flexibility to acknowledge the needs of local community on a site-specific assessment when crafting standards and guidelines and decision-making processes.

The report needs to strengthen the explanation for changes in forest-related industries: decline in mining and timber.

The Forest Service is not responsible for meeting all of the economic interests of a local community.

Recognize the influence of federal land ownership on local communities and their sustainability.

The number of Forest Service planning efforts fatigues some communities.

The Forest Service needs greater capacity to engage local communities around volunteers to do work and funding to do projects.

A direct link exists between the value of services and the costs associated with managing and protecting the forests. Fuel reduction is an area for monetization.

Strengthen discussion of coordinating and assessing various jurisdictions' plans for the area.

ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY

Like that report recognizes that land has been managed for thousands of years.

Like the inclusive descriptions within ecological integrity. While brief, they are adequate for the purpose of an assessment.

Important to increase the pace and scale of restoration and fuel reduction. Identify barriers to restoration and how forest planning can address barriers.

Management practices and trends: it is unclear how today's practices are helping us achieve ecological integrity.

The Forest Service needs to strengthen the connectivity section because it is the agency that has the greatest capacity to successfully address connectivity.

Connectivity with other lands: focus the section on ecological integrity across lands as a system, not as a national forest.

Identify indicators of connectivity: do selected species adequately represent connectivity of terrestrial and aquatic systems. Explore the concept of wildlife corridors.

Identify metric for ecological integrity so we can measure over time and adaptively manage the forest.

Improve, define and strengthen adaptive management.

Report is light on trends, especially with regards to species. Provide more information about species and the number of species at risk and how it reflects on integrity.

Identify data gaps.

Include the effects of insect and disease, particularly beetle and bark diseases more meaningfully.

Identify stressors, especially related to climate change.

Address the effect of population growth on ecological conditions.

FIRE RESILIENCE

Explore the policy implications of bringing back more prescribed fire.

Improve definitions of historical fire, beneficial fires, bad fire, and uncharacteristic (consider National Academy of Science article from 2012).

Like that smoke impacts on communities are addressed.

Strengthen the benefits of low severity fire and other beneficial fire.

Strengthen discussion of the cost of treating landscape and economic tradeoffs between managed wildfire versus prescribed fire versus mechanical thinning.

Fire and water quality need to be tied together better.

The report discusses bringing back more fire, but does not address how the Forest Service will manage stands over time.

Include products associated with vegetation management to reduce fire risk (saw logs, biomass, etc.)

Identify and explain the uses of other plans (county, state and tribal).

Expand discussion of relationship between climate change and fire.

Strengthen discussion of the effectiveness of the wild land – urban interface.

SUSTAINABLE RECREATION

Like discussion of demographics and immigrant population's use.

Does not include explanation for whether recreation is sustainable now.

Given expected changes in levels and types of uses, identify how recreation is expected to change or shift, specifically changes in types of use and numbers of visitors.

Improve explanation for how fire and density control will enhance recreation.

Would recommend more inclusive data, e.g. fishing, not hunting.

Identify opportunities for collaborating with outside users.

Are efforts on increasing recreation enough to support economically disadvantaged communities?

Identify where recreation is causing environmental harm or impacts.

Identify future trends for transportation.

Lack discussion of road-less and wilderness areas.

Identify more areas for wilderness designation.

Identify opportunity to leverage resources by partnering with non-governmental organizations.

Strengthen discussion on impact on health and welfare. Impact on obesity is largely absent.

Missing from recreation: hiking as a type, recreation conflicts, and disabled recreation access.

WATER QUALITY AND QUANTITY

Sedimentation, water quality, and timing need to be tied better between the sections.

Discuss the effects of fire on the quantity of water if landscapes are converted from conifers to brush and increase evapo-transpiration rates.

Elaborate the effects of fire and varying fire management strategies on water quality / quantity.

303(d) list water impaired water bodies.

Roads can be positive on water too if they provide access for fire, riparian management, fishing, and camping.

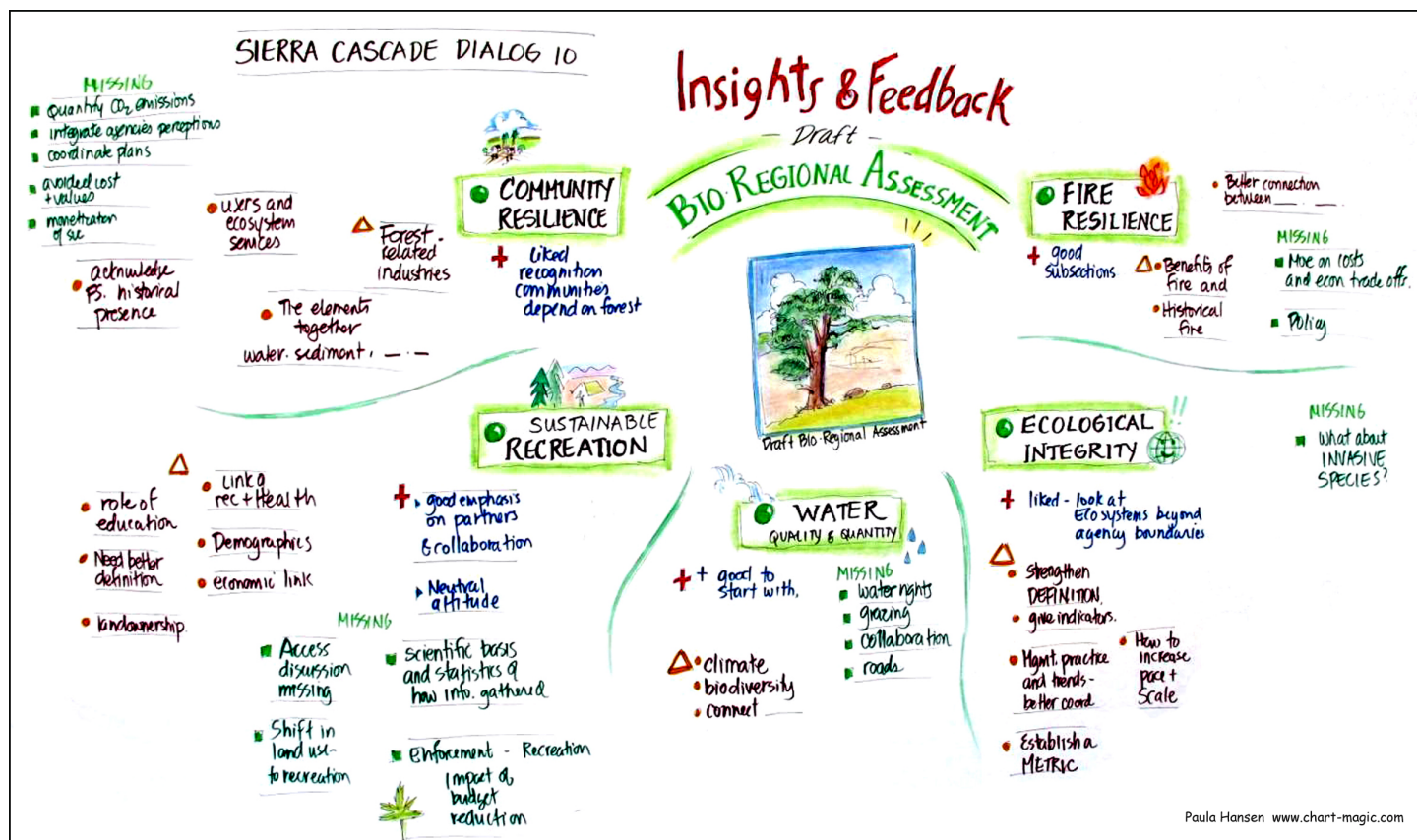
Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project said that the aquatic system was the most altered and impaired due principally to dams and fish plantings.

Strengthen discussion of the cumulative and direct effects of grazing on riparian values and water quality.

Elaborate on biological characteristics determine a specie's distribution and can be affected by climate change and how species adapt to climate change. Assumes the reader is highly familiar with climate change effects.

Identify opportunities to collaborate with users outside the Sierras.

Include mention of Integrated Regional Water Management plans in all regions and as an opportunity for shared funding.



OTHER IDEAS

Need to engage young people in forest planning.

Appreciate that the report recognizes that as a society, we don't fully understand tribal uses of land.

Participant liked the sections with specific quantification of information.

Concern that the relationship between local elected officials and the decisions points. Elected officials should have priority for providing input.

Concern that multiple use concept is being replaced by references to ecological integrity and ecosystem services. The multiple use concept is not the same. Recognize grazing as part of the multiple use concept.

GRAPHICS BY PAULA HANSEN

RELATED DOCUMENTS

Dialog 10 **Crowdbrite Summary Reports**

Dialog 10 Wall Charts & Wall Charts Transcribed

Presentation: Forest Plan Revision and the Draft Bio-Regional Assessment, by Deb Whittall, Region 5, Social Scientist, dated May 30, 2013